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Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business

Twenty-fourth session
Geneva, 30 April - 1 May 2018

Report of the Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) on its twenty-fourth session

I. Attendance

1. The United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) held its twenty-fourth Plenary session in Geneva from 30 April – 1 May 2018.

2. The following countries were represented: Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belarus, Canada, China, Croatia, Cyprus, Finland, Germany, Greece, India, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Luxembourg, Malaysia, The Netherlands, Nigeria, Russian Federation, Senegal, Spain, Thailand, Ukraine and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

3. The following United Nations organizations participated in the meeting: The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the International Trade Centre (ITC). The following intergovernmental organization participated in the meeting: The Asia Pacific Council for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (AFACT).

4. The Under-Secretary General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) opened the meeting. She congratulated the delegates for the success of the thirtieth and thirty-first Forums and its conferences. She mentioned the implementation of UN/CEFACT standards within the ECE region and beyond; she encouraged UN/CEFACT to continue its collaboration between the public and private sectors and with other organizations to support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the achievement of its Sustainable Development Goals.

II. Adoption of the agenda (Agenda Item 1)

5. The secretariat presented the revised annotated provisional agenda ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/1/Rev.1. The secretariat mentioned the need to make further amendments to the revised annotated provisional agenda to correct some technical errors. Document ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/INF.3 "Bureau Report" was added for agenda item 4 and Item 7a is for noting (not approval).

6. The Plenary adopted the revised annotated provisional agenda ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/1/Rev.1 with the proposed amendments (**Decision 18-01**).

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III. Elections (Agenda Item 2)

7. Elections were held to elect the UN/CEFACT Chair. The secretariat recalled the background to the election, the election procedure, as well as the steps taken to request the nomination of candidates. Following a secret ballot with three candidates, the Plenary elected Mrs. Sylvia (Sue) Probert as UN/CEFACT Chair for the period 2018 to 2021 **(Decision 18-02)**.

IV. Matters arising since the twenty-third session (Agenda Item 3)

8. The secretariat presented document ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/3 on matters arising since the twenty-third session. The document underlines the collaboration established with UNCTAD, notably the multi-stakeholder initiative called "eTrade for All" at the e-Commerce week in April 2017. During this event ECE co-organised two sessions: one on e-commerce and trade logistics with UNCTAD, the International Trade Centre (ITC) and the World Customs Organization; and another on single window as an enabler for e-commerce, with the African Alliance for e-Commerce. The ECE also contributed to sessions on blockchain and the internet of things at the 2018 edition of the UNCTAD e-Commerce week.

9. The secretariat highlighted the relevance of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) to the work of UN/CEFACT. The ECE secretariat has played an active role in supporting the implementation of the TFA through its role in the Annex D+ meetings organized by the WTO to coordinate the efforts of different international organizations supporting implementation of the TFA. In addition, ECE together with the other Annex D+ organizations co-organized an event, "Trade Facilitation on Track" during the Eleventh Ministerial Conference of the WTO. ECE also supported the UNCTAD Empowerment Programme for National Trade Facilitation Committees in Cameroon, Gabon and Benin (May and August 2017).

10. The work of UN/CEFACT is also very relevant for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. ECE and UN/CEFACT recommendations, standards and tools make it simpler, faster and cheaper to trade and exchange information, thus contributing to increased growth, productivity and employment in countries. In this context, brainstorming sessions were held during the European Union Development Days 2017 in Brussels as well as a conference during the thirtieth UN/CEFACT Forum in Rome, to discuss the findings of a study produced by the secretariat, including recommendations for enhancing transparency and traceability of textile value chains. As a follow-up, the ECE study "Transparency in textile value chains in relation to the environmental, social and human health impacts of parts, components and production processes" (ECE/TRADE/439) was published, and the secretariat is currently working on a joint project proposal with ITC and the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development of the European Commission for the development of a traceability framework in the textile sector. The secretariat also led the organization of a Roundtable on Sustainable Development Goal 12 "Responsible Production and Consumption" during the ECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in March 2018, to facilitate peer learning and experience sharing among ECE member States on approaches to advance the circular economy.

11. In addition, UN/CEFACT has been working on projects for sustainable management of fisheries in support of Sustainable Development Goal 14 "Life Below Water," particularly in relation to target 14.4 for combating overfishing and illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing. In order to advance action to support this target, the ECE Executive Committee, in June 2017, established a Team of Specialists (ToS) on Sustainable Fisheries to promote and facilitate the implementation of the UN/CEFACT Fisheries Language for Universal Exchange

(FLUX) standard, or other sustainable fisheries data standards on a global scale. This will be reported in agenda item 10.

12. The secretariat reported that ECE is currently raising funds to maintain and enhance its Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide (TFIG), to develop additional domains, itineraries and sections and to establish this tool as the central portal for information on trade facilitation in support of the implementation of the WTO TFA (thus facilitating coordination among key players in trade facilitation) and to include in the TFIG a One United Nations inquiry point on trade facilitation for countries. A project proposal has been developed to this end for submission to potential interested donors. ITC is currently supporting the enhancement and update of the existing itinerary on the WTO TFA and the establishment of a new itinerary on trade facilitation for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). These are expected to be completed by 2018.

13. Regarding technical cooperation and advisory services to countries of the ECE region, in 2017, the secretariat continued to support a project entitled "Improved capacity of governmental trade control agencies in Albania to implement Single Window", implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Entrepreneurship of Albania, the Albanian Customs Administration, and UNCTAD. In 2016, the Trade Facilitation Section of the ECE Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, in cooperation with Working Party 6 on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies, launched a project aimed at developing training materials and conducting a series of training workshops for trade support institutions in order to familiarize traders and government officials with international and national trade-related regulations, policies, trends and issues. The project, implemented in close collaboration with Eurasian Economic Commission, will be completed in 2018.

14. In October 2017, the Trade Facilitation Section, jointly with the Market Access Section, both of the ECE Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, started a project to assist Tajikistan to empower their National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) to align with the recommendations of the ECE study on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade, and thereby enable the Government to fulfil its commitments under the WTO TFA. In 2018, the project will involve the delivery of a series of workshops (to train and coach the members of the NTFC) and the preparation a technical paper and a national roadmap for trade facilitation implementation in support of export enhancement and diversification, intended to deepen Tajikistan's integration into global value chains. The project will be implemented in close collaboration with ITC and UNCTAD.

15. In January 2018, the Trade Facilitation Section and the Regional Advisor of the ECE Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, launched a three-year project, funded under the eleventh tranche of the United Nations Development Account, to strengthen the national capacities of selected transition economies to integrate into the international rules-based trading system. The project will focus on selected countries with economies in transition (one from each of the following subregions): Southeast Europe, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Georgia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia have been tentatively proposed).

16. Finally, the Trade Facilitation Section is commencing activities under a Russian funded project to strengthen the capacity of Central Asian countries to implement trade facilitation measures and better integrate into the international rules-based trading system. The project aims to enhance the capacity of policymakers and experts in national trade facilitation bodies, regulatory agencies and other relevant stakeholders, to develop and implement trade facilitation policies and measures (notably in the area of WTO TFA in which ECE has valuable expertise), to improve their capacity to measure progress in the implementation of trade facilitation, and to achieve internal and cross-border policy

coherence for the simplification and harmonization of trade procedures. The project is expected to be completed by December 2019.

17. The secretariat underlined the collaboration activities with other organizations, notably with the Directorate General for Mobility and Transport, the Directorate General for Taxation and Customs, the Directorate General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries and the Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development of the European Commission. The secretariat has also engaged with the Eurasian Economic Commission, including for technical assistance activities on trade facilitation in Central Asian countries (e.g. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan).

18. Further on collaboration, the secretariat liaises actively with the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) through the Electronic Business Memorandum of Understanding. In order to ensure coherency between standards and in an attempt to pool resources, the secretariat is officially liaising with specific technical committees: ISO Technical Committee 154 (Processes, data elements and documents in commerce, industry and administration), ISO Technical Committee 204 (Intelligent Transport Systems), ISO Technical Committee 307 (Blockchain), ISO project committee 308 (Chain of Custody) and the ITU-T Distributed Ledger Technology group.

19. The Regional Advisor for the ECE Division of Economic Cooperation and Trade reported on advisory and training services within the region, notably in Azerbaijan, Ukraine, and the Czech Republic and also in cooperation with the Directorate General for Taxation and Customs of the European Commission and the Eurasian Economic Commission. He supports the United Nations Special Programme for Central Asia and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation to identify and utilize trade facilitation mechanisms and UN/CEFACT deliverables.

20. The delegation of Ukraine thanked the Regional Advisor and the UN/CEFACT secretariat for the assistance to set up the National Trade Facilitation Body; they are planning a forum on 1 June 2018 on a national single window and would appreciate the continued support of the ECE. The delegation of the Netherlands requested that important events should be communicated to Heads of Delegation in a separate, dedicated email. The delegation of the Netherlands also expressed their desire that UN/CEFACT work collaboratively with other standards setting bodies, through the Electronic Business Memorandum of Understanding and its Management Group. The secretariat thanked the Bureau members who helped it with the outreach of UN/CEFACT activities in various events.

21. The Plenary took note of the report on matters arising and requested that the secretariat report on matters arising at the next plenary session in 2019 (**Decision 18-03**).

V. Bureau overview of developments (Agenda Item 4)

22. The Vice Chair in charge of the International Trade Procedures Programme Development Area (PDA) reported on the progress of recommendation projects including a project on core principles for the operation of single window; a project on single submission portals, which are private-sector driven initiatives that can offer similar facilitation mechanisms to a single window; and a project to revise Recommendation 33 which is the UN/CEFACT foundation single window guidance recommendation. She also presented a new project, Integrated Services for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in International Trade that aims to assist MSMEs to access international trading markets.

23. The Vice Chair in charge of the Buy/Pay PDA provided an update on projects in his PDA including the purchase order financing request which has already been sent to the bureau for approval and a chapter for the whitepaper on Blockchain. After the completion of the Background Research Paper on Public Procurement Using International Standards, a new project on Sustainable Procurement was launched, in view of helping countries to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 12.7 (Promote public procurement practices that are sustainable). The PDA also continues its work to assist in the adoption of the UN/CEFACT Cross Industry Invoice standard with a project to share implementation guides on the subject.

24. The Vice Chair in charge of the Ship PDA provided an overview on projects in the Transport and Logistics Domain as well as on the United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations (UN/LOCODE), and reiterated that the maritime container industry is extensively using the United Nations Electronic Data Interchange for Administrations, Commerce and Transport (UN/EDIFACT). During the last year the PDA has delivered the electronic consignment note (eCMR) standard under item 7 and progressed its work on a Multi-Modal Transport Reference Data Model and the Logistic Data Pipeline. It launched projects on Smart Container Monitoring, an alignment project to the International Maritime Organization's Compendium on Facilitation and Electronic Business (IMO FAL Compendium) and a project on a Buy-Ship-Pay Reference Data Model to ensure coherence and harmonization between the transport and supply chain models. She reported that the UN/LOCODE conference took place in April 2017 and the report presentation is under agenda item 7 for noting as are the presentations on UN/LOCODE directories 2017-1 and 2017-2. One of the results from the series of conferences on UN/LOCODE was the launch of a new project aiming to revise ECE Recommendation 16, which is the foundation of the UN/LOCODE recommendation.

25. The Vice Chair in charge of the Regulatory PDA reported on their initiatives. Following a Bureau decision to consolidate all potential blockchain initiatives within UN/CEFACT into one project, a project was launched in the spring of 2017 and met with great interest both among UN/CEFACT experts and others. This was reflected in the success of the two conferences held at the October 2017 Forum and the April 2018 Forum. In addition, a conference at the April 2018 Forum on Internet of Things was also well received by the experts and a potential project is being considered. New activities on Cyber Security and Time-Stamping may be launched soon. Under the environment domain, he reported on activities such as the transboundary movement of waste and waste management.

26. The Vice Chair in charge of the Sectoral PDA reported on ongoing work within the Agriculture Domain on a Traceability Framework Guide, on Track and Trace for Plant, Animal and their By-Products, and on maintaining existing deliverables such as eCerts, eCrops, eLab and the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed. He also reported that a report on the use and importance of the FLUX standard would be given later in the plenary presentations. Within the Travel and Tourism Domain, ongoing activities include projects on Destination Travel Information and a Green Paper on Experience Programmes that could potentially stimulate local, rural economies, as well as contributions made by the travel and tourism domain to blockchain. The work of the Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries is presented under agenda item 10.

27. The Vice Chair in charge of the Methodology and Technology PDA reported on ongoing activities which includes the Library Publication Formats project and the Standard Business Document Header (SBDH) / Business Document Envelope (BDE) project in collaboration with the Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards (OASIS). He announced that the Code Management project had been completed and approved by the Bureau and requested that delegations encourage their technical teams

to review these deliverables. The Library and Syntax Focal Points completed work on UN/EDIFACT Directories D.17A, D.17B; the Core Component Libraries 17A, 17B; and the UN/CEFACT XML Schema Library D.17A, D.17B are presented for noting under agenda item 7. He announced that the libraries and directories version 18A were ready for publication and should be published online shortly. All Data Maintenance Request (DMR) submissions for 18B must be submitted eight weeks prior to the first day of the next forum.

28. The Vice Chair in charge of the Harmonization PDA reported on the creation of his teams and the success and interest that this activity has generated. He reported that there has been a successful recruiting drive to engage resources, including past key experts, in the work programme which has led to the PDA developing a full and functional team. The team launched a project on canonical models in view of promoting harmonization throughout the standards and assisted on the blockchain whitepaper project. The team has also been looking at new technologies and new methods for exchanging information and how this will impact on UN/CEFACT in the years to come.

29. The Chair presented the report on Bureau activities since the twenty-third Plenary (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/INF.3). The Bureau has had twenty-three bi-weekly conference calls, one face-to-face meeting and has made sixty-nine decisions, more than three quarters of which concern project development. She also reported on liaison and representation of UN/CEFACT at conferences and other organizations. Over the past year, UN/CEFACT was represented at sixty meetings in all regions of the world. The Chair also noted that the use of twitter and other communication materials, as requested at the twenty-second Plenary, has been adopted. She also emphasised the important role that the secretariat plays in assisting in the dissemination of the work of UN/CEFACT and the global nature of this representation activity, especially in light of the implementation of the WTO TFA and the Sustainable Development Goals.

30. The Plenary took note of the Bureau overview of recent developments and requested that the Bureau report on developments at the next Plenary session in 2019 (**Decision 18-04**).

VI. Reports of Rapporteurs (Agenda Item 5)

31. The Rapporteur for Africa presented his report on activities since the last session (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/4) and the Rapporteur for Asia and the Pacific presented her report (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/5).

32. The Regional Rapporteur for Africa reported on events within the region on trade facilitation and eBusiness as well as some of the key events internationally where he has made presentations. He outlined the work of the African Alliance for eCommerce and the launch of the African Performance Institute. He reported that workshops were held in Eastern Africa; at the WTO Eleventh Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires; in Barcelona at an e-commerce summit aiming to establish a label for e-commerce; and a single window conference in Accra. Furthermore, work was carried out with UNCTAD during the e-Commerce week, as well as collaboration with the World Customs Organization and WTO on e-commerce, and projects on e-signatures and exchange of e-certificate of origin will be conducted in East and Central Africa.

33. The Regional Rapporteur for Asia and the Pacific reported on the activities of the Asia Pacific Council for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (AFACT). She outlined the structure and the events of AFACT as well as the results of the eASIA Award 2017 which rewards electronic business initiatives, notably those that implement UN/CEFACT standards. She announced the upcoming AFACT meetings in Bangladesh and invited all interested parties to participate. She also reported on specific ESCAP activities such as the

Trade Facilitation and monitoring mechanism and project which was implemented in Bhutan, Bangladesh and Nepal; the launch of an e-learning course on e-commerce and e-business, and the certificate of origin, which has been implemented by the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for purposes of improving the function of the ASEAN Single Window.

34. A delegation requested that future Rapporteur reports reflect not only the activities of the individual rapporteurs, but to the extent possible, of the entire region. The rapporteurs reminded the Plenary that the size of their respective region make it difficult to cover it all. The Plenary commended the Rapporteurs for their continued support to expand the outreach work of UN/CEFACT in the African and the Asia-Pacific regions and invited them to further develop synergies and cooperation among the regions.

35. The Plenary took note of the reports of the Rapporteurs for Africa and for Asia and the Pacific and requested that they provide reports at the next Plenary session in 2019 **(Decision 18-05)**.

VII. Activities of other Economic Commission for Europe bodies and international organizations of interest to United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (Agenda Item 6)

36. Delegates were briefed on work relevant to UN/CEFACT by a representative of the secretariat servicing the following ECE bodies: the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards and its Subsidiary Bodies: the Working Parties on Agricultural Quality Standards (Working Party 7) and on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (Working Party 6).

37. The Secretary of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards presented the work of these bodies, including the agricultural quality standards which interests many experts in the UN/CEFACT Agriculture, Agri-food and Fisheries Domain. He also highlighted the good cooperation that UN/CEFACT put in place with the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies.

38. Representatives of the secretariat servicing the following bodies: Working Party on Road Transport and Working Party on Customs Questions Affecting Transport (Working Party 30) reported on their activities of interest for UN/CEFACT. These representatives highlighted the good, ongoing cooperation with UN/CEFACT and mentioned potential areas for future collaboration.

39. The Secretary of Working Party 30 highlighted the relevance of the 1975 TIR[1] Convention as global customs transit system for road transport and, increasingly, for intermodal transport. Efforts to computerize the TIR system (eTIR) are in an advanced stage and the use of the UN/CEFACT modelling methodology has greatly contributed thereto. He also reported that the TIR system is now implemented in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates and, soon, in China. India, the State of Palestine and Qatar are among the latest accessions to the TIR Convention, which now counts with 73 contracting parties.

40. The secretary of the Working Party on Road Transport underlined the fruitful collaboration with UN/CEFACT over the past year. The publication of a standard by UN/CEFACT for the eCMR directly supports the Convention on the Contract for the International Carriage of Goods by Road (CMR) and its Additional Protocol concerning the e-CMR. This work has been presented several times to the CMR Working Party and

[1] Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets.

officially launched during the 4 April 2018 meeting. New collaboration is planned on an electronic version of the green card for passenger vehicle insurance.

41. A delegation inquired about the obstacles to the dematerialization of the transport documents of the TIR and CMR Convention. The secretary of the Working Party on Road Transport noted that the existence of exchange platforms (or lack of these) is a challenge; furthermore, for the eCMR, it is based on private law which makes it a private sector initiative. The secretariat of Working Party 30 reminded that concerning eTIR, most of the technical work has been completed; it is the legal provisions which are stalled and the change management which are now the key challenges.

42. The Vice Chair in charge of the Regulatory Programme Development Area brought to the attention of the Plenary that a White Paper on Trusted Transboundary Environment concerning mutual recognition, including the requirements for facilitation, is to be presented to the Plenary under item 7.

43. The Chair thanked the ECE secretariat for the valuable collaboration and expressed her hope that this will continue in the future.

VIII. Recommendations and standards (Agenda Item 7)

44. The secretariat, Bureau and Project Team Leaders provided a brief overview of the different standards to be considered by the Plenary.

45. The secretariat announced that since the last Plenary, and according to agreed procedures, it had issued:

- versions D17.A and D17.B of UN/EDIFACT;
- releases 2017-1 and 2017-2 of the UN/LOCODE Directory;
- releases D17.A and D17.B of the UN/CEFACT Core Component Library and XML Schema Library;
- the Animal Traceability Business Requirement Specification version 1.2;
- the FLUX, also known as "Electronic Interchange of fisheries catch data" Business Requirement Specification (BRS) version 1.1;
- the Traceability of Primary Natural Products BRS version 1;
- the Cross Industry Scheduling BRS version 2;
- the Cross Industry Catalogue Process Requirement Specification Mapping (RSM) version 2;
- the Cross Industry Delivering Process RSM version 3;
- the Cross Industry Ordering Process RSM version 3;
- the Cross Industry Quotation Process RSM version 2;
- the Cross Industry Remittance Process RSM version 2; and
- the electronic consignment note "eCMR" BRS version 1.

46. The Plenary took note of the standards presented by the secretariat and requested that they continue to be updated on a regular basis (**Decision 18-06**). The Chair expressed appreciation for UN/CEFACT experts' work, especially for the development, maintenance and validation of the UN/CEFACT Libraries.

47. The Project Leader of the White Paper on Paperless Trade (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/6) presented the work and deliverable of its group. The Plenary took note of the document (**Decision 18-07**).

48. The Plenary took note of the White Paper on Trusted Transboundary Environment (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/7) (**Decision 18-08**). A delegation inquired on the next steps concerning this project. It was explained that the project team has proposed a Framework Agreement (TTE) project based on this white paper to cover TTE/mutual recognition. A position paper to present the need for a framework agreement on TTE/mutual recognition has also been finalized by the project team. Russian speaking delegations further noted that the Russian translation included inaccuracies with erroneous translation of some terms, and requested that the secretariat bring this to the attention of the translation services. They also requested the translation of the annexes into Russian and the secretariat explained that translation of annexes was not carried out by the translators. The Chair invited Russian speaking delegations to contribute to this task, if possible.

49. The Plenary took note of the White Paper on the Data Pipeline Concept for Improving Data Quality in the Supply Chain (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/8) (**Decision 18-09**). A delegation recailed the joint regional commission event in 2010 which introduced the notion of data pipeline and asked if this White Paper took it into account. The chair noted that this should be fully aligned but would take his comment into consideration.

50. The Project Lead of the UN/CEFACT Blockchain project presented the work of its group and its deliverables. The Plenary took note of the explanatory annex of the White Paper on Technical Application of Blockchain to UN/CEFACT Deliverables (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/9) (**Decision 18-10**) and the first draft of the main text of this document (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/INF.1) will shortly go to a public review. The project and the good collaboration between all UN/CEFACT experts within this project was commended.

51. The Plenary took note of the White Paper on Women in Trade Facilitation (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/10) (**Decision 18-11**) and the Procedure for Reference Data Model Artefact Publication (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/11) (**Decision 18-12**).

52. UN/CEFACT has continued to develop Executive Guides that aim to provide a brief, high-level description of UN/CEFACT's technical work. Three such guides were presented to and noted by the Plenary: Executive Guide on eInvoicing/Cross Industry Invoice (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/12) (**Decision 18-13**), Executive Guide on UN/LOCODE (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/13) (**Decision 18-14**) and Executive Guide on e-CMR (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/14) (**Decision 18-15**).

53. The Secretary presented the Meeting Report and Recommendations of the 4th ECE International Conference on Single Window of October 2017 (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/15) which laid the initial directions for the recent UN/CEFACT project aiming to revise Recommendation 33, the foundation of the Single Window Recommendation. The Plenary took note of the report and recommendations (**Decision 18-16**). The secretariat also presented the meeting report of the 3rd UN/LOCODE Conference of April 2017 (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/16) (**Decision 18-17**).

54. The secretariat presented the outcome of the joint effort of the United Nations Regional Commissions reporting on the implementation of trade facilitation and electronic business measures, including the provisions of the WTO TFA, that in 2017 covered 120 Member States from across the five regions of the world. This work shows the progression in the implementation of such measures since the last report in 2015. The Plenary took note of the ECE 2017 Regional Report on Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/17) and of the 2017 Global Report on Trade Facilitation

and Paperless Trade of the United Nations Regional Commissions (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/18) (**Decision 18-18**) and requested that the secretariat continue to monitor the progress of trade facilitation and paperless trade both in the region and at the global level, in cooperation with the other United Nations Regional Commissions (**Decision 18-19**).

55. Following up on Plenary Decision 16-16 (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2016/2, para. 64), the UN/CEFACT Bureau, in coordination with the secretariat, prepared a questionnaire to gather information from member States and international organizations in order to develop a report on how UN/CEFACT deliverables are being used. The questionnaire was presented to the twenty-second Plenary (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2017/INF.3). The secretariat presented the results and the Report on the use of UN/CEFACT Standards (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/INF.2). The Plenary took note of this report and requested that the secretariat continue to monitor the use of UN/CEFACT standards and report on this regularly (**Decision 18-20**).

IX. United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business structure, mandate, terms of reference, and procedures (Agenda Item 8)

56. The Bureau prepared a Representation Procedure Guidelines (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/19) to provide a framework on external communication and representation of UN/CEFACT experts. The Plenary took note of these guidelines (**Decision 18-21**). A delegation inquired if such a guideline is necessary given the existence of the UN/CEFACT Code of Conduct and questioned why the guidelines expressly mention positive communication. The secretariat explained that the language is to encourage constructive criticism and that UN/CEFACT is different from other working parties within the United Nations. Further, such rules and guidelines aim to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest and that all contributions of experts and donors are respected. The secretariat will ensure the proper implementation of these procedures. There was a further inquiry on the feasibility of pre-approval of presentations and communications. The secretariat responded that it is obligatory to have pre-approval by the secretariat for the use of any United Nations logo and that the current guideline is targeting official presentations and communications.

57. Some delegations enquired about the purpose of white papers, if they are only for addressing policy issues, if they are preparatory work for future projects and how they should be reviewed by the Plenary.

58. Delegations thanked UN/CEFACT for its good work and expressed support for the format of white papers; furthermore, it was reminded that different forms of guidance material were needed that could also serve as a background study for developing future recommendations. The Chair said that the Bureau will take up these topics and propose a way forward.

X. Advisory Group on the United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations (Agenda Item 9)

59. At the twenty-third Plenary, the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group Mandate and Terms of Reference were approved (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2017/17) and subsequently approved by Executive Committee of UNECE. This group aims to ensure the maintenance and further development of the UN/LOCODE standards and to further enhance the network of UN/LOCODE Focal Points. The first meeting of this group was held in December 2017;

the meeting report (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/20) was presented to the Plenary for endorsement.

60. At its first meeting; the Advisory Group decided to propose a revision of Recommendation 16 on UN/LOCODE; consequently, the project has been approved by the Bureau and the project group met for its inaugural meeting on 27 April 2018, during the UN/CEFACT Forum.

61. The Plenary endorsed the report of the first meeting of the Advisory Group on the United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations. (**Decision 18- 22**).

XI. Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries (Agenda Item 10)

62. At the twenty-third Plenary, the "Sustainable Fisheries Team of Specialists Mandate and Terms of Reference" were approved (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2017/16) and these were subsequently approved, with minor modifications, by the ECE Executive Committee during its 92nd meeting (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2017/16/Rev1), and agreed to the establishment of the Team of Specialists. This group aims to support the implementation of the Fisheries Language for Universal eXchange (FLUX) standard as well as other standards on sustainable fisheries on a global scale. The first meeting of this group was held in January 2018; the meeting's report (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/22) was presented to the Plenary for endorsement.

63. The Sustainable Fisheries Team of Specialists also presented for endorsement their proposed Programme of Work for the period 2018-2019 (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/22).

64. The secretariat reported that it is contributing to the United Nations Oceans Forum on trade-related aspects on Sustainable Development Goal 14 jointly organized by FAO, UNCTAD, ECE; United Nations Environment and other bodies, which will be held in Geneva in July 2018. It was also reported that the Directorate General for Marine Affairs of the European Commission offered financial support to the work of the Team of Specialists. The UN/CEFACT Chair expressed sincere gratitude to the European Commission for its support of the work of the Team of Specialists.

65. The Plenary endorsed the report of the first meeting of the Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries and its Programme of Work for the period 2018-2019 (**Decision 18- 23**).

XII. Future Challenges in trade facilitation and electronic business (Agenda Item 11)

66. Speakers from UNCTAD and ITC had an opportunity to provide their perspectives on the future challenges in trade facilitation and electronic business.

67. The Senior Analysist of Trade Facilitation of the ITC presented their work on electronic business and trade facilitation. He underlined that one of the challenges in this area is the rapidly changing pace of technology and the way that modern business is conducted. These developments can only complement legal will and enable the necessary supporting processes and procedures. The focus of standard and technological developments should be on SMEs; if it works for SMEs, then it should work for the large corporations, too. The replacement of signed and stamped paper documents will be a challenge in the future.

68. The Chief of the UNCTAD Transport and Logistics Branch highlighted three key objectives of their work (trade efficiency, generating income with trade logistics and making trade sustainable) to be achieved through three interconnected pillars, which are research and analysis; technical assistance and capacity building; in addition to consensus building. He also proposed that UN/CEFACT could work on a new project to support the shipping industry "Ship types and sizes" and to support UNCTAD in their updating the "Minimum Standards for Shipping Agents". The Plenary supported the idea on working on these new projects and requested that the Bureau consider the emerging topics presented by the speakers (**Decision 18-24**).

69. UN/CEFACT continues to have an important role to play in the implementation of the WTO's Trade Facilitation Agreement, including with respect to Single Windows, use of international standards and national trade facilitation committees.

70. Traceability is becoming an increasingly important issue for governments, business, and organisations. It is critical that UN/CEFACT standards continue to underpin new trends in international trade. For this reason, the secretariat, with the support of UN/CEFACT experts and partner international organizations, has prepared a background study on the "Transparency in textile value chains in relation to the environmental, social and human health impacts of parts, components and production processes" (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/23). The Plenary took note of this background study and requested that the secretariat continue to work on the project to support traceability in the textile sector (**Decision 18-25**).

71. UN/CEFACT also seeks to ensure that its work supports the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. One of the Sustainable Development Goals under review this year is Sustainable Development Goal 12 "Responsible Production and Consumption." The secretariat has prepared a briefing note on UN/CEFACT contributions to Sustainable Development Goal 12 (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/24). Along the same lines, the secretariat presented a briefing note on blockchain for Sustainable Development Goals (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/25). The Plenary took note of these briefing notes (**Decision 18-26**). Delegations expressed their interest in moving toward the development of blockchain applications. However, it was noted that the current deliverables need to continue to be maintained as they are useful and are being used.

72. The Chair thanked the secretariat for these briefing notes and inquired about the difference between briefing notes and white papers. The secretariat underlined that the former are presented by the secretariat. A delegation suggested that it would be useful to involve the UN/CEFACT domains in the development of secretariat papers. The secretariat responded that this has been the case for these briefing notes.

73. Delegations were invited to raise other issues not previously addressed during the session.

XIII. Other business

74. The delegation of Senegal expressed that in his region, implementation of single window and trade facilitation is sometimes difficult because of the diversity and complexity of UN/CEFACT deliverables. He proposed that UN/CEFACT should consider working on guidance material that targets different types of stakeholders: business, government and technical providers.

75. The delegation of China expressed his pleasure to see several recent topics within UN/CEFACT that corresponds to the needs expressed in their country. He further invited all participants to join the October 2018 forum which is planned in Hangzhou.

76. The delegation of the Netherlands requested that the Plenary report of the previous session be put on the subsequent Plenary agenda for information. They also recalled that there was one outstanding point for their delegation in the 23rd Session report concerning any contradictions with their national legislation. After verification, none were found.

77. A delegation expressed their appreciation to the volunteer experts that help develop and maintain UN/CEFACT deliverables and proposed a more formal acknowledgement of their work. The chair agreed and underlined that this had been done at the 30th Forum in Rome for UN/EDIFACT contributions.

78. The delegation of Thailand raised the issue of attracting more delegates to these types of events. Governments often have insufficient funds. Within their region, they are establishing public-private partnerships to find funding to help bring the appropriate people from government. Another delegation also pointed out the need to increase attendance at the Plenary. One delegation highlighted that the choice of dates for the Plenary is important and that this year's session coincided with a public holiday observed in many countries. The chair suggested that a half day knowledge sharing before the Plenary might help attract more participation. Other solutions are to be discussed in the Bureau.

79. The delegation of Thailand underlined that the UN/CEFACT Head of Delegation approval process is different for each country and many government officials do not understand the processes.

80. The delegation of the Russian Federation commended UN/CEFACT for its work on trade facilitation as well as the training and events within the region by the ECE secretariat in cooperation with other organizations. He also noted that developed UN/CEFACT recommendations and standards should be based on a common conceptual framework and common approaches to the quantitative assessment of the digital economy. He brought up the issues of data security and confidentiality and suggested that UN/CEFACT could support the development of information and technology products in cooperation with other organizations such as UNCTAD and ITC.

XIV. Adoption of decisions and draft report of the twenty-fourth session

81. The Plenary adopted the decisions made at and the report of the twenty-fourth session (**Decision 18-27**).